



Home Security--Keep Burglars Out¹

William J. Becker²

Have you ever locked yourself out of your home and started looking for a way inside without calling the locksmith? If so, you've looked at your home through the eyes of a burglar! Chances are you saw enough ways to get in to feel a little frightened, and you should be!

Across the United States, millions of homes are burglarized annually. In Florida alone, hundreds of thousands of homes are burglarized and millions of dollars worth of property are lost, little of it ever recovered.

Obviously, keeping burglars out is the goal, but in 50 percent of all burglaries, the culprit walked or climbed right into the house through unlocked doors or windows. We make it easy for them! Burglary has been defined as the "crime of opportunity." You can eliminate the "opportunity" by making your home less inviting and more difficult to enter.

The time to take the necessary preventive steps is now! Don't wait to lock the door after your valuables have been carried away. A modest investment in time and money plus some "common sense" behavior changes can make your home more burglar proof.

Do not gamble with your home and family--begin practicing crime prevention today!

THE PROBLEMS

There are many causes for the continued increase in the number of home burglaries. The temptations and opportunities increase because our society is more mobile, families move in and out of our neighborhoods regularly. We do not know our neighbors, our neighbors don't know us. More homes are left vacant more of the time as more adults work away from home and the children are at school or day care centers. Families are away from the home more frequently, they take more vacations, and go out to eat more often.

There is a subculture that "thinks it's OK" to support or supplement a lifestyle by committing crimes. Where else can these people obtain the finances to support a drug habit or a lifestyle beyond their resources? Some actually believe it is "stupid" to purchase televisions, cameras, bicycles or jewelry when it is so easy to steal and because insurance will cover much of the loss.

And we, the victims of crime, often make it easy for the burglar. We live in homes poorly designed or constructed to prevent burglaries. We leave messages to the burglars that we have property worth stealing. We provide clues that no one is home. We even leave home with doors and windows unlocked!

What are some of the "situations" that make it easier for burglars to "hit" our home?

1. This document is Circular 786, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida.
2. William J. Becker, Professor and extension safety specialist, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. For information on obtaining other extension publications, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office.

Florida Cooperative Extension Service / Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences / University of Florida / John T. Woeste, Dean

THINGS WE DO WHICH MAKE BURGLARY EASY

- Leave home with doors and windows unlocked.
- Develop habits--patterns of absence--that tell burglars when you are gone and, therefore, when it is "safe" to burglarize your home.
- Leave notes attached to the front door that can inform a burglar that the house is unoccupied and for how long.
- Talk about the valuable stereos, video equipment, paintings, jewelry, coin collections, etc. we have in our home when we are out in public.
- Tell others about our security system. This tells burglars that we must have something worth stealing. It also alerts them that we have a system and tells them to render it useless before breaking and entering.
- Place keys in mailboxes, under door mats, on top of door frames. That's not "hiding" a key from an experienced burglar.
- Give our entire key ring to auto repairmen, parking attendants, or others who then can have duplicate keys made.
- Carry a key ring identified with our name, address, license tag number, or telephone number. Should you lose your keys, the finder can gain access to your home at his convenience. He can call your home, or watch it, until he is certain everyone is gone.
- Allow newspapers and mail to accumulate, and the yard to look unattended. During extended absences, this is an open invitation to burglars.
- Telephone answering machines are the major tools of some burglars. They can call your home regularly to determine your pattern of absence. They can then burglarize your home, confident that no one will come home and surprise them.
- Tell others, who need not know, of our plans to be away from home for a period of time.
- Give personal information over the phone to a self-declared salesperson or survey-taker. The caller could be a burglar attempting to gain information

about you, and when you are home or away. Telling a caller "no one will be home at that time" is foolish.

- Open the door before knowing who is there. Do not rely on common chain latches; they are useless security devices against a heavy push by a burglar.

These are but some of the things people do that make it easier for the burglar to "hit" their homes. In addition, there are a number of features about your home which might also attract burglars.

HOME FEATURES THAT ATTRACT BURGLARIES

- Isolated homes, some distance from the road and neighbors, are ready targets. These are homes where burglars are not likely to be seen or heard.
- Dark homes in dark yards. Burglars like the dark; they hate lights.
- Windows, hidden behind bushes or in dark isolated areas, tempt burglars. They prefer to work in areas where they are not easily seen.
- Leaving benches, ladders or other items accessible so burglars can easily reach windows, even second-story windows.
- Spring-activated or doorknob locks are easy to open; a knife or screwdriver may be all that is needed.
- Hollow-core doors are easily kicked in.
- Exterior doors with exterior hinges are not safe; it is simple to remove the hinge pins and then remove the entire door.
- Jalousie doors and double doors are frequent security problems. They are easy to pry or force open.
- Sliding-glass doors normally are equipped with a lock easily opened by even amateur burglars. A screwdriver or pry bar is all that's needed.
- Transoms above doors and windows in or next to doors can be broken, and the burglar can reach in and unlock the door.
- Thumb-operated window latches, not really locks, are a major problem. One broken window and the burglar has access to your entire home.

- Jalousie-type (Figure 1) are difficult to secure. Like jalousie doors, they are easy to pry or force open. Jalousie windows are a very high security risk and should be replaced if at all possible. They can be secured by installing metal grating on the inside of the window area with a quick release feature in the event of fire. At a comparable cost to installing grating, the windows can be replaced with another type which offers better security.
- Awning-type windows (Figure 2), like the jalousie type, are difficult to secure and are easy to pry or force open. Awning windows are difficult to secure. The removal of the inside operator handle adds some security, but keep the handle handy in case of emergencies. Awning windows should be tightly closed to enhance security.

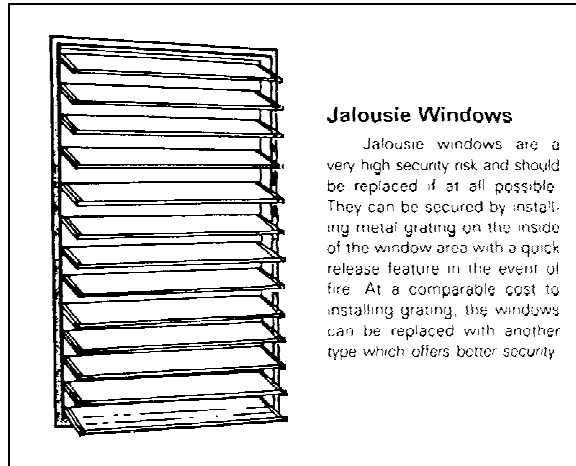


Figure 1. Jalousie-type windows.

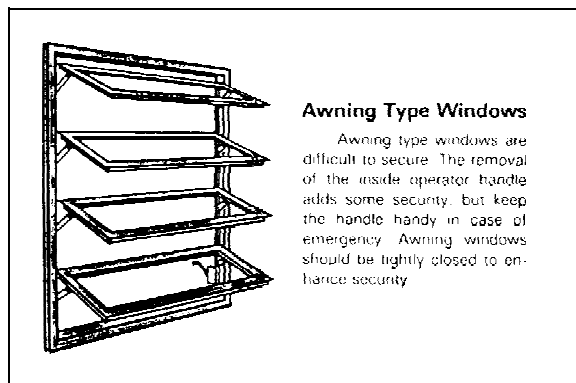


Figure 2. Awning-type windows.

THE SOLUTIONS

Fortunately, there are things we can do to make our homes secure. If we want to prevent burglaries of our homes, we must make our homes undesirable targets for burglars. Many are common sense things which require little time and few dollars.

Some Simple, Easy Solutions

- Lock all doors even when you are gone "only for a minute." It takes a burglar only seconds to enter an unlocked door.
- Install a wide-angle (180 degree plus) peephole in your front door. Never open the door to an uninvited stranger.
- Never allow unidentified persons in your home. If you have any doubt, check the authenticity of their identification by checking their ID through the peephole viewer or calling their employer.
- Have your home appear to be occupied in your absence. Have your newspaper and mail discontinued or picked up daily. Place lights, a radio, or television on a timer so that they go on and off on a staggered schedule.
- Have your lawn cut, sprinklers turned on, have a neighbor park his car in your driveway to indicate that the home is occupied. Notify neighbors, friends and the police of your extended absence.
- Have your house number prominently displayed, so it is easy to read day or night. Large reflective numbers are preferred. They will aid police and other emergency persons to find your home quickly.
- Keep the exterior of your home lighted. This is an effective deterrent because burglars do not like to be seen.
- Keep trees and shrubs trimmed so that windows are visible. Consider covering windows in dark, isolated areas with sturdy grates or burglar bars.
- A good watchdog can provide security. Burglars don't like anything to draw attention to them. A barking dog might persuade the thief to look elsewhere.
- When a house key is lost or you move to a new home, have the tumblers in all exterior door locks

changed. This can be done by a locksmith at minimal cost.

- Never carry a key ring that, if lost, can be traced to your home address. If you want to have a return address attached to your keys, use an address other than your home, such as a friend or family member's business address.
- When you need to give a key to anyone, give them only the key(s) needed, not the entire key ring.
- Should your telephone answering machine record a number of phone calls when no message was received, or should you receive a pattern of telephone calls while you are home which, when you pick up, get no response, reinforce all security measures, notify neighbors and the police.
- Ladders, benches, ropes and other items which would make it easy for a burglar to reach a window, ledge or roof should be locked up in a garage or shed.
- Report suspicious persons or activities to the police. The police would rather check out suspicious circumstances than spend time investigating burglaries. Place the emergency phone number of the local law enforcement agency on or near the telephone.

We have reviewed some simple, easy solutions which would discourage burglars from "hitting" your home. Now what are some other practices which would make it difficult for a burglar to enter your home?

Secure Your Doors

- Install case-hardened quality deadbolt locks that enter one inch into a metal socket securely mounted in the door frame.
- For even more security you might want to consider a double-cylinder lock that requires a key to open from either side. That way, if a burglar enters through a window, he still can't carry large items out the door. Another option is an expensive spider lock which has bolts that lock into metal sockets on all four sides of the door. Both these type locks should be installed by professionals.
- Replace hollow-core doors with solid-core or steel-clad doors. Wooden door frames can be reinforced

WARNING: The double-cylinder and spider locks should only be used when absolutely necessary. Be sure doors are not so secure that they are difficult to open from the inside in case of a fire or other emergency. Teach young children how to lock and unlock the door from the inside. But warn them to never open the door to strangers.

with metal stripping or replaced with sturdier metal frames.

- Sliding-glass doors should have impact-resistant glass panes for security and safety. They should be equipped with sturdy deadbolts, vertical bolts or double-cylinder locks. A variety of effective locks are available from home supply centers. For added protection, a broom handle should be cut so it will lay flat in the bottom track of the door.
- Garage doors should be closed and securely locked. The door leading from the garage to the house is a common entry point for burglars.
- Quality electronic garage door openers with automatic locking devices offer good security. For other garage doors, case-hardened padlocks and hasps provide good protection. Overhead garage doors can be secured by drilling a hole in the metal track directly above a door wheel and inserting steel pins or locks. There should be a lock or steel pin in the track on each side of the door.
- If doors are being secured with hasps and padlocks, the hasp should be of hardened steel, secured to the door and frame in such a manner that the screws and/or bolts cannot be removed by use of common tools, such as screwdrivers, pliers or wrenches, etc. The padlock should be of case-hardened steel with a minimum of 9/32" shackle with a double-action locking mechanism.

Secure Your Windows

- Replace windows in or next to doors with impact-resistant plastic or cover them with decorative metal grates which have openings too small to put a hand through.
- Transoms, above doors, can be closed up or covered with a heavy grate or mesh secured from the inside.

- Sliding-glass windows can be secured by the same means suggested for sliding-glass doors.
- Replace thumb-operated window latches with key-operated locks. Keep a key in each room with such locks so that windows can be opened, especially in an emergency. But keep them far enough from a window so that a burglar can't break a pane, reach in and get the key.
- Drilling a hole through the lower sash into the second sash at a downward angle, then inserting a nail or steel pin will provide some security. However, remember the burglar could break a window pane, reach in and remove the nail or steel pin.

Install a Security System

Install a security system, but remember it is only helpful if it is used. The systems should have the following minimum features: An emergency power supply in case the power is interrupted, an extremely loud external horn to draw attention to your home and/or a continuous monitoring system connected to a security company.

Quality security systems are expensive to install, may have monthly charges and require maintenance. Additionally, family members must develop the habit of keeping it turned on; an inoperative system provides little protection.

Shop around, check with law enforcement officials, your insurance agent, and other users of security systems before selecting and installing one. Generally, a home must contain considerable valuable property before a security system is cost effective.

INSURANCE

Insurance is an alternative and/or additional method of protecting your financial interest in property. While insurance dollars can never replace the sentimental, cultural or heritage value of an item, it can replace its monetary value. However, to do that, property must be identified, inventoried and have an assessed value. In addition, you can expect your insurance premium to increase, thus costing you more money. This leads us to the next step in a home security program--"Operation Identification."

OPERATION IDENTIFICATION

There is an "Operation Identification" program in Florida designed to help recover stolen property. Your Florida driver's license number should be engraved on your valuable property, such as stereo components, video equipment, cameras, lawn mowers, etc. Engraving equipment can be purchased at reasonable cost from most hardware stores and home centers. This equipment may also be borrowed from a local law enforcement agency at little or no cost.

Engrave your Florida driver's license number (FL followed by a 12-digit alpha-numeric code number) on a rigid component of the item. If you don't have a Florida driver's license, you can still obtain an identification number from any Florida Driver's License Station. Clearly identified property is less desirable to burglars since it is harder to "fence" (sell) and easier to track.

Make a list of all your identified valuables. The list should include the name of the article, manufacturer, serial or model number, location of the identification mark. Keep this list in a secure location, such as your safety deposit box.

Valuables which cannot be marked, such as jewelry, coins, paintings, antiques, etc. should be photographed. The photograph with a detailed description of the articles should be kept in a safe place, such as your safety deposit box. Keep valuable jewelry and coin collections in safety deposit boxes at the bank when not in use. Make certain that your valuables are identified and listed on your property insurance policy.

Guns can be particularly attractive to burglars. Most guns are valuable and some, such as handguns, can be used in carrying out crimes. You should maintain good identification of guns, and they should be carefully stored and not be displayed where they are visible from outside the house. Keep guns and ammunition stored in separate places, both for children's safety and to decrease the chance of having a burglar arm himself while in your house.

Display an "Operation Identification" sticker (Figure 3) on all your exterior doors. This may cause a burglar to reconsider burglarizing your home. "Operation Identification" stickers are available from your local law enforcement agency.

NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH

Initiate or become active in a "Neighborhood Crime Watch" program in cooperation with the local police force. Display the "Neighborhood Crime Watch" sticker (Figure 4) and set up a neighborhood telephone chain to keep one another informed of any criminal activity. Be a good neighbor, keep an "eye" on others' property.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR HOME HAS BEEN BURGLARIZED

If you discover that your home has been burglarized **BEFORE** you enter the home, **DO NOT ENTER**. The burglars may still be inside and may become violent. Go to a nearby telephone and call the local law enforcement agency.

If you have entered the home and found it burglarized, leave immediately and go to a nearby telephone and call the local law enforcement agency. The burglar may still be in the home. Never touch anything or attempt to "straighten things up" before the police arrive. You may be destroying evidence.

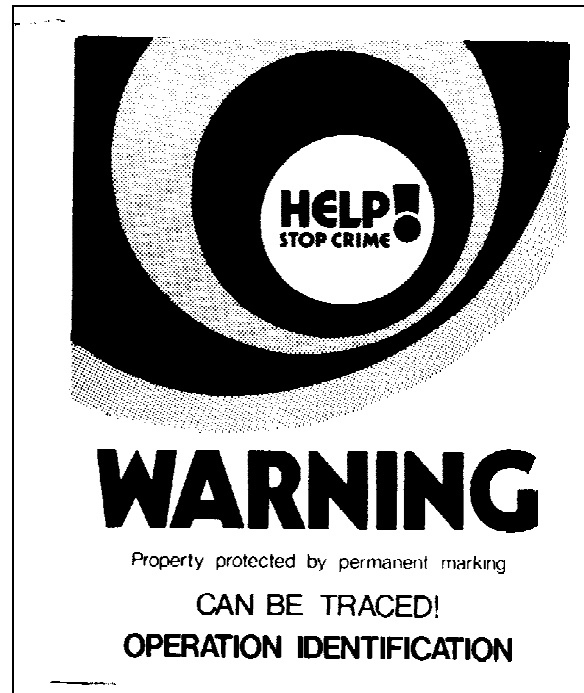


Figure 3. Operation identification sticker.



Figure 4. Neighborhood crime watch area sticker.